

PEASLAKE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Meeting held on Monday 15th April 2024 in Peaslake Memorial Hall at 8pm

The meeting was chaired by Cyndie Gould and attended by 29 Peaslakers

Welcome and introduction

Present: Cyndie Gould (Chair), Julie Knight (Minutes), Nicola Anstey, Julie Barham, Nick Bray, Sally Bray, Adrian Bell, Amanda Cobbett, Mark Cobbett, Louise Collins, Zoe Fowle, Adrienne Golightly, Sean Griffin, Anne Heyes, Rob Hedgecock, Jim Heyes, Ted Horton, Zoe Horton, Jeff Jones, Marion Jones, Drew Nicholson, Lesley Perry, Gerry Reffo, Martyn Warrell, Janette Weller, Nick Wells, Pennie Wells, Alice Williams, Jane Williams.

Apologies: Shiona Bacon, Nigel Downer, Tania Florent and Deb & Kevin Stevens.

There were no matters arising from the last minutes except on Shere Parish Council.

Treasurer's Report: The balance in the account was £261.97 after the annual insurance has been paid.

B4SH Report

Government Gigabit Voucher Scheme - In a report at the end of 2023 the Government announced that nearly 80% of the country which was designated as qualifying for gigabit vouchers had now been covered. The original voucher objective was to cover 85% of designated rural areas. The Government is confident that this target will be achieved by 31st March 2025 and therefore has given notice that the current voucher scheme will cease on that date.

Peaslake is designated as a qualifying rural area under the voucher scheme and residents who are considering taking the B4SH broadband service should contact B4SH on <https://gigupanddown.net/contact/> to register their interest.

Shere Internet - You may have seen, or received, leaflets advertising the services of a new broadband provider in the area. Despite its title and internet address, it is not a local provider but a commercial business which operates from an address in Gloucester.

Reports from organisations

Peaslake School Nursery – Louise Collins, the Nursery Manager, was pleased to report that Becky Lynch was successful in achieving base camp at Mount Everest in the Easter Holidays. She raised the sum of £1450 for the Nursery which will be put towards improvements needed for outside resources and the Forest School programme.

Peaslake School - dates for the diary:

Teddy Bears Picnic - Bank Holiday Monday 6th May, at Abinger Cricket Ground.

Open Gardens – Sunday 9th June - this will be based around Sweet Lane in the North of the village.

Memorial Hall – Ted Horton talked about the proposed new extension to the hall. A major part of the necessary funds has now been raised, and work may well commence this summer. However there is still a small shortfall and the community is encouraged to visit the Hall website where details of the Buy a Brick scheme can be found.

The new stage curtains at the hall were much admired by all.

Peaslake Players - The players are putting on a production of Agatha Christie's "Go Back for Murder" on the 9th, 10th & 11th May in the Memorial Hall. Ted Horton (chairman) encouraged us all to book tickets on the website. The play is full of "murder, clues, red herrings & fabulous characters"

Peaslake Climate Café – The Community Litter Pick on the 7th April was well attended by adults and children who scoured the village for rubbish. Many bags were filled and tea enjoyed afterwards.

Next month's meeting will be on Sunday 5th May at 7pm in the Old School Room and will encourage us all to help our wildlife by embracing No Mow May. Guest speakers from Bookham will be talking about The Blue Campaign and wild flower gardening. Everyone is welcome.

Peaslake Community Fund – It was reported that following the March decision by the Community Fund not to join forces with Guildford Philanthropy the committee is now hoping to welcome new team members to revitalise the fund and its operations.

The Fund will be again sponsoring and organising The Peaslake Presents Stage at the Fair. This year the Fund has made a request to be one of the beneficiaries of the fair.

Peaslake Fair- Bank Holiday Monday 26th August – Alice Williams reported that everything is on track with several new volunteers taking on crucial roles. Preparations are going well with stalls booked. Allocation of this year's Fair proceeds was discussed and agreed - 30% Peaslake School, 30% Memorial Hall, 30% Friends of the Hurtwood & 10% Peaslake Community Fund.

Shere Parish Council: Report on Peaslake Farm Fields and 21 March Parish Council Proceedings

Misconduct Allegations

Residents were concerned to hear that Shere Parish Council had made misconduct complaints to the Monitoring Officer against Gerry Reffo and Tania Florent. **The complaints were not upheld.**

Gerry explained that she and Tania Florent were surprised at the Council meeting when the Chair asked whether they had a disclosable pecuniary interest or a perceived interest in Peaslake Farm Fields (which would mean they could not participate in discussion or vote). They said no to both questions. Gerry asked why the Chair was questioning her now since she had worked on and voted on Peaslake Farm issues for 10 years. The Chair then alleged that they had collected information in a contentious way and they should not vote on the Peaslake Farm Fields lease item. After members of the public protested, the Chair said they could vote but only this time. The Clerk said that the matter should go to the Monitoring Officer in Guildford Borough Council. Both Gerry and Tania welcomed independent scrutiny. Tania was attending her first Council meeting when confronted with these allegations.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer has told Tania and Gerry that **it is clear that neither of you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.**

On the issue of Perceived Interest, he advised that '**only you can make that determination** in respect of any matter that comes before the Parish Council, as only you know all the facts. I can see from your email(s) that you have clearly given this serious consideration and have concluded that you do not believe that you are conflicted in such a way that would restrict your ability fully to participate in the affairs of the Parish Council relating to the Farmyard and/or Peaslake Fields'.

A Future Car Park on Peaslake Farm Fields

Peaslakers were surprised to hear that SPC were planning a **car park on Peaslake Farm Fields** using the strip of land which they wanted to retain and not lease. (Mike Keeble's statement item 23-137 on the lease between SPC and Coverwood <https://www.shereparishcouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Council-Minutes-21st-March-2024-redacted.pdf>)

Mike's statement/amendments on car parking (although well intentioned) assume that residents accept the principle of putting a car parking development on the Fields. This is unlikely because:

- the 2023 survey completed by 108 Peaslake residents/households showed overwhelming support for preserving and protecting the character of the fields, supporting biodiversity and not permitting car parking;
- SPC made promises to the community in 2016 and 2023 to protect the fields for the long term;
- SPC is not taking sufficient account of the increased flood risk to the village from converting a strip of land into a car park that was waterlogged for 5 months up to the end of March 24; and when the Environment Agency is warning Councils about a 40% increase in surface water over the next 20 years.

Mike's other amendment won more support. It was to replace the 15 year no fault break clause with a break clause that would only be triggered if the tenant broke the terms of the lease following a warning.

Openness and Representation

Peaslakers were unhappy with the lack of consultation and openness. Surely, the Council was supposed to represent them. They asked for a meeting held in Peaslake to discuss the issues; full transparency and all relevant documents published in advance of the meeting so people can consider them beforehand.

Gerry explained that SPC marking documents 'confidential' and excluding the public from discussions made it extremely difficult to take decisions openly, fairly and transparently.

At the 21 March Council, the Clerk had said that documents were confidential at Tim Metson's request. Tim then waived confidentiality which should have opened documents up to public view. Instead his waiver was not recorded in the minutes and the documents have not been published.

Some residents discussed using Freedom of Information to see documentation. Gerry noted her intention to contact the Monitoring Officer about openness and transparency.

Follow Up on Action Points from March PCC

1) To challenge procedural irregularities in SPC decisions relating to Peaslake Farm concerning

- Retention of a 10-metre strip of land for an undisclosed purpose
- Instituting a 15 year no fault break clause in the 25-year lease.

The irregularity sprang from SPC agreeing the above actions on an item that was on the agenda for Update; and **without** waiting for the results of consultation with the community.

In response to Gerry's Point of Order, Mike Keeble said SPC's intention was to move forward drafting the lease and the terms could still be voted on. Councillors welcomed the revised text. Disappointingly, the draft minutes captured the proposed wording, but failed to remove the irregular decisions from the record.

2) To collect wider views from the community. 39 residents emailed their views in response to Paul Carter's request. All challenged the no fault break clause and questioned or disagreed with land retention. A number of residents came to the Council meeting. They supported Tania and Gerry when the Chair tried to remove their right to vote. Gerry thanked them all.

Other Issues

Approval of Grants: SCC have approved grants to transform the space in Peaslake Village Hall to support community activity; and to provide disabled access for the Old School Room opening it up to a broader range of users.

Pursers Lane Flooding: SCC Councillor Bob Hughes is discussing with Highways. Gerry sent him a dossier with photographs of flooding over the years and a full history.

Peaslake Farm Housing Development: next steps are to find out about interest from other providers including the runner up last time, establish the correct processes and investigate flood risks.

Planters for the Bus Stop: good news that these are nearly ready and look great.

Any Other Business

Concerns were raised about the fencing around the cemetery at St Mark's Church. Many parts are in dire need of repairs and replacement – Is this in the pipeline?

Date of next meeting: Monday 13th May 8pm in Peaslake Memorial Hall. (This is a week late due to the Bank Holiday)

JK/SMcC 23.4.24